



News

Fontanans help Workforce Investment Board succeed

By SHEL SEGAL

A native of Fontana, Phil Cothran has been selling insurance on Sierra Avenue for the past 18 years. But his real passion comes from serving on the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board.

Administered as a public-private venture through the U.S. Department of Labor, the board focuses on helping people find jobs, changing their skills to find better paying jobs and forecasting what the area's job needs will be in the future, Cothran said.

As a member of both the local and national boards that oversee this, Cothran said the board also finds employers who will hire people through this program and possibly even give them training to enter a new field.

"You can be employed and want a better job," said Cothran, who added the board helped nearly 78,000 county residents in 2005. "Anyone from having a master's degree down to jobless people can be helped. We also have a youth area we take care of beginning at age 17."

In addition, Cothran said the board has three offices throughout the county -- in San Bernardino, Rancho Cucamonga and Victorville -- which try to bring many public and private organizations under one umbrella.

"People come to us," he said. "We have three one-stops around the county. We bring as many government and private agencies into one place as possible."

One of the purposes of the program is to match potential employees with potential employers, even if that means retraining someone or just giving them a few extra pointers on a new position, Cothran said.

"We do a lot of talking people into upgrading their skills and they can get a more substantial raise in their pay," he said. "One of our major roles is being (able to mediate) between employers, employees and the training aspect."

The training aspect is very important as while there are plenty of job seekers in the county, their skills do not always match the current needs of employers, Cothran said.

"We look at the economy in San Bernardino County and look at what are going to be the needs of the employers," he said. "The board spends most of its time with the employers. There's no shortage of employees coming through the door."

For example, while much has been made over the years about American manufacturing jobs going overseas, Cothran said there are many manufacturing jobs locally that aren't being filled.

"The manufacturing jobs are very high tech," said Cothran, adding California Steel has trained more than 100 electricians through this program. "You're still making parts, but you have to know how to use a computer."

Two other Fontana-based manufacturing companies in the program are S and D Specialty and Stockmar Industrial, Cothran said.

Other areas with job shortages are construction and the medical field, especially in nursing, Cothran said.

THE CHAIRMAN of the local board, Terry Klenske of Fontana-based Dalton Trucking, said the program has been very successful.

"We're very effective at utilizing what we have available," Klenske said. "We are facilitators. We try to match up people through our services with better opportunities. For the funds we have, I feel we're very effective at helping people who want to be helped. We have a great track record at helping people who want an entry level job and getting them on a career path."

WHILE the program comes from the federal government, it is business people who make the day-to-day decisions on how to run it, Cothran said.

"Our board is business driven," said Cothran, who added the program is free to job seekers. "Most of the board is comprised of private businesses. We interface with industry sectors."

"What makes this unique is it is federally funded, but private sector businesses drive it. It's not a typical federal program. Regular business guys state the direction for how this is going to go in San Bernardino County and how job training will be accomplished."

In addition, "blue collar" jobs are not the only ones offered through this program, Cothran said. "White collar" jobs can be found here as well.

A vertical advertisement for Rock Honda. At the top, the text "WHY PAY MORE?" is written in large, bold, red letters with a yellow outline. Below this, a curved banner reads "Home of the 'Rock Bottom' Prices". In the center is a graphic of a rock with a pair of sunglasses resting on it. The word "ROCK" is written in large, bold, red letters across the rock, and "HONDA" is written in white letters on a blue rectangular background below the rock. Below the graphic, the text "Click Here For More Information" is written in a small, italicized font. This is followed by "9612 SIERRA AVE., FONTANA, CA" in bold black letters. Below that is the phone number "866.876.ROCK" in large, bold, blue letters. Underneath the phone number is "POINT, CLICK & DRIVE!" in bold red letters. At the bottom is the website "www.rockhonda.com" in bold black letters.

"It's not entirely low-end, entry level jobs," Cothran said. "It's also for management-type, highly educated, well-trained people."

But the main reason for the program is to keep the county's economic engine moving, Cothran said.

"There's nothing more important to the area than a trained workforce," Cothran said. "Economic growth isn't going to happen without that."

For more information about the program, call 387-9870.